

Students Benefit From Smoke-free On-Campus Housing

Issue

The college years are often the best years of your life, but if you are living in an unhealthy environment, this sentiment is less true. Before the 2006-2007 school year, students living in on-campus housing on the Francis Marion University campus in Florence, S.C. were exposed to secondhand smoke where they lived. Some of the negative health effects from secondhand smoke exposure include:

- Increased risk of heart attack and stroke;
- Increased susceptibility to and aggravation of colds, allergies, flu, and other viruses;
- Increased frequency of asthma attacks; and
- Increased likelihood of lung cancer.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, eliminating smoking in indoor spaces is the only way to fully protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke exposure. The home is the major location of secondhand smoke for adults. For 1,400 students at Francis Marion University, that home is on-campus housing.

Intervention

In 2006, one and a half years' worth of advocacy and education paid off for Francis Marion University students living in on-campus housing. The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant staff, along with other community partners including Francis Marion University's assistant director of residence life, began by educating the student resident advisors and the Student Government Association on the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure. A survey was completed among students living on campus, and the results were in favor of changing the policies. The students were not only excited about smoke-free dorms, but they were also enthusiastic about the possibility that their professors would quit smoking in offices.

After receiving positive responses from students, facts about the dangers of secondhand smoke and examples of what other universities had done were shared with the director of residence life, the university's president, and board of directors. From that moment on, there was a snowball effect to get the tobacco policies on campus strengthened.

Impact

The new Francis Marion University tobacco policy, which was enforced in August 2006, resulted in the following improvements:

- All dorms and apartments on campus are smoke-free except for one building (which was difficult to fill at the beginning of the school year);
- There are stricter entryway restrictions that do not allow smoking in the halls or breezeways; and
- Professors are not allowed to smoke in their offices, even if they have tenure.

According to the assistant director of residence life, "As far as housing is concerned, it has helped in reducing the number of roommate conflicts due to smoking differences, it has helped with walkways, breezeways, and stairwells that are now smoke-free and are no longer filled with smokers while nonsmokers are trying to pass through. I can imagine that professors no longer smoking in their offices is a positive change for the students that need to go speak with them during office hours."

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